

CREST: Reviewer Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

When is this tip sheet needed?

When considering submitting a CREST proposal (6 of 9).

Concept

In addition to being briefed on the objectives of the CREST program (tip sheet 1-02), the CREST program solicitation (tip sheet 1-03) and the merit-review criteria identified by the National Science Board (tip sheet 1-04), all merit reviewers must sign a declaration of confidentiality and confirm the absence of conflicts of interest about the content of the proposals they read or hear discussed by others in the review process (detailed in NSF Form 1230-P attached). At the same time, though PIs can access verbatim copies of the text reviews their proposal receives, the identity of the reviewers is kept confidential to NSF. PIs are also welcome to suggest reviewers for their proposals at the time the proposal is submitted to FastLane, but it is at the discretion of the CREST program officer which reviewers are assigned to each proposal.

While reviewers do not always know which proposals they will receive for review, or what the specific content of those proposals might be, they are expected to notify CREST program staff of any conflicts as soon as these are discovered. The proposal is then reassigned to another reviewer of equivalent expertise (see tip sheet 1-05).

Even given NSF's rigorous expectation of anonymity, the community of experts in some fields may be limited to a few, well-qualified researchers. In highly specialized areas, there is always the potential for similar ideas to arise independently and apart from any given proposal with or without NSF review. NSF takes the above declarations made by reviewers—whether in person at the panel or via FastLane certification—most seriously, and will investigate breaches in this process. The Foundation's Office of the Inspector General is the unit in charge of investigating allegations of intellectual impropriety.

Management Considerations

- ☐ None for prospective PIs

Administrative Considerations

- ☐ None for prospective PIs

Sources and Further Reading

NSF *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG)

Online at <http://www.nsf.gov/pubsys/ods/getpub.cfm?gpg>

Tip Sheet 1-06: Reviewer Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest
CREST Best Practices

NSF Office of the Inspector General. Online at: <http://www.oig.nsf.gov/>

What's Next?

How are CREST reviewers recruited or nominated? > > > [NEXT \(Nominating CREST Reviewers\)](#)

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